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1861

Tupper (M. F.)

ALFRED.



A PATRIOTIC PLAY,

In Five Acts.

BY

MARTIN F. TUPPER,

Author of "Proverbial Philosophy," &c.

REPRINT.

Manchester :

GEORGE FALKNER, PRINTER, BROWN STREET & KING STREET.

1861.

FIRST PRESENTED AT

THE

QUEEN'S THEATRE, MANCHESTER,

JUNE, 1861,

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF MR. WALTER MONTGOMERY,
AND UNDER MR. F. B. EGAN'S LESSEESHIP.

PERSONS.

KING ALFRED...	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. WALTER MONTGOMERY.
ELSWITHA, <i>his Queen</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	MISS JULIA SEAMAN,
BERTHA, <i>his Sister</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	MISS HODSON.
EDWARD and ETHELWARD, <i>Boy Princes</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	THE MISSES FOOTE.
GUTHROM, <i>the Danish Viking</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. CHARLES HORSMAN.
ETHELNOTH, <i>Headman of Somersets</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. MACDONALD.
HEREWARD, <i>Headman of Wilts</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. HAWKINS.
WULF, <i>a boorish Celtic Neatherd</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. ROSS.
EGGA, <i>his old vixen Wife</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	MRS. DOYNE.
SIDROC, <i>a Danish Jarl</i>.	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. DOYNE.
THE CHIEF SKALD....	...	...	...	...	...	Mr. PRESTON.
ENGLISH LORDS....	...	...	...	...	...	MESSRS. LONG, ADAMS AND FOOTE.
A GAOLER.	Mr. W. ADAMS.
DANISH AND BRITISH SOLDIERS, &c.	MESSRS. SHARP, BURGoyNE, &c.

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Scenes laid in Wilts and Somersets : at Chippenham, Ethandune, Athelney,
and Glastonbury.

Dresses, Arms, Standards, Appointments, and Architecture of the Period.
Incidents, chiefly historical.

Time of Action a few days : including the 23rd of March, 878 : the victory
of Ethandune having been gained on
Easter Day in that year.

The Overture to be exclusively English and national music : to commence with wailing Welsh or old British tunes, then to swell into marches and military Bardism,—thereafter to change gradually into other recognised national airs ; a well wrought cento of tunes, including (for example) “The Bay of Biscay,” “Rule Britannia,” and so forth, ending with “God save the Queen.” The like music between the Acts.

822
183a
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ACT I.

SCENE I.

A desolate heath near Chippenham Castle,—the wind sighing, and the roar of battle in the distance: a long pause: then a rout of flying English and pursuing Danes in the back of the stage; with afterwards a wounded white horse, royally caparisoned, and riderless, galloping across. After this a lull: and then hurriedly from opposite points, back and front, ETHELNOTH and HEReward run in, with mace and sword, bloody.

HEReward (*eagerly*).

Where's the King?—where's the King?—

ETHELNOTH.

Alas! alas!

I much do fear me dead: his milkwhite charger,
Ever the very focus of the fight,
Fell with him o'er a heap of dead and dying,
And, madden'd by the arrows, broke away
Leaving the King afoot. I saw him stand
Surrounded by a jackal pack of Danes,
The very lion at bay; they crowded on,
But still he slew and slew, heaps upon heaps;
I strove to reach him, but could not get nigh;
For, wielding his red mace and battle-axe
In either hand more terribly than Thor,
Stoutly he cleft a narrow bloody lane
Right through their opposite host,—and then, as if
Fell'd by some coward caitiffs from behind,
I lost his gold-sphered head!

HEReward.

Woe worth the day!

With Alfred's death, what hope for England's life?

ETHELNOTH (*despondingly*).

What hope?—for Alfred is the soul of England,
Of free, brave, honourable, religious England,—
That doth with an indomitable will
What duty hath determined shall be done :
And, with him dead, alas, for England dead !
Seeing the days are evil, and her sons
Through mammon-worship and the selfishness
Of peace and quietness at any price
Are thus degenerate from old country love.
Why, friend,—our magnates, baser than their names,
To save their rank, and still upon the poor
To trample with a rich man's cruel heel,
All, save our gallant few in Somerset,
Have covertly gone over to the Dane,
Worship his Raven, call this Guthrom king,
And in their quaking crafty avarice
Pretending peace with all men, brotherhood,
And universal love,—that poppy milk
Of poisoned human kindness,—have deserted
Alfred to fight for England all alone !

HEREWARD.

Alone?—nay, Ethelnoth,—for some stand with him.

ETHELNOTH.

We will not boast ourselves, good Hereward,
But of the nobler and the richer sort
All else have been corrupted by the Dane,
Flattered,—or frightened at his pirate fist
Clutching their moneybags,—thus to stand back
And leave our English Alfred all alone !

HEREWARD.

Alone?—yet are there millions with the King :
O Sir, the country's heart, the country's strength,
Her thews and muscles all are with the King,—
The People are for England and the King,—
And God with us,—then say not thou alone !

ETHELNOTH.

My noble friend forgive,—and Heaven forgive
 That false and feeble word of fear, alone :
 O wise and good rebuke !—my vision clears,—
 Alone ? I see so many now with us,
 All that is honest, earnest, brave in England,
 And God Himself on our side for the right,
 That none but perishable evil things
 Would seem to be against us. Yet, ah ! dread
 Unspeakable, O ruin past repair,
 If English Alfred with his battleaxe
 Hath hewed him out only a grave,—

[WULF *the neatherd runs in, ridiculously frightened.*

—Stand back !—

Speak, sirrah,—leave thy gaping.

WULF.

Mighty captains,
 How went the battle down in Wilts ? which won,
 Saxon or Dane ? there's plenty o' both about,
 Axemen and pikemen, sword and mace and bowmen,
 I'm so afeared at all o' them,—which side won ?

HEREWARD.

Art thou for Alfred, churl ?

WULF.

Nay, mighty captain,
 Art *thou* for Alfred ? I'm—for—*you*, great captains,
 Is then the Saxon or the Dane my lord ?

ETHELNOTH.

Alfred is lord and king above thee, churl.

WULF.

Just what yon archer told me,—to the word :
 A wounded dusty relic of the fight
 Now biding at my hovel : when I asked
 Which side had won, and who was lord and king,—
 He quoth, quoth he,—

ETHELNOTH.

Stop, sirrah : lead us straight
To see this archer ; he may bring perchance
Some tidings of the king : we'll to thy hovel.

[*they go out.*]

SCENE II.

The neatherd's hut. EGGA, the housewife, comes in, and busies herself about kneading dough, going first up to ALFRED, who, disguised as an archer, mends his broken bow beside a hearth.

EGGA (*angrily*).

Nay now, young man, but I heard thee amouthing and araving and tongue-clappering lustily ; and all about England's woes forsooth ! Why, ye'll scare my fowls : and there's the old grey hen asitting on thirteen eggs to hatch come Woden's-day : a plague on thy thriftless clamouring !

ALFRED.

(*looking up, and feeling the point of an arrow.*)

Dame, I will hold my peace.

EGGA.

Ay, and it's pity too there's anything else abroad : why can't we all bide at peace, and hatch our chickens quietly, I should like to know. A plague on that quarrelsome king of ourn, says I ! Why can't he be peaceably disposed with these brave newcomers,—but fights and wars with the worthy gentlemen, to the ruination of all our crops ? A plague on the great king Alfred, says I,—and I only wish I had 'un here to tell 'un what I thought of 'un.

ALFRED.

What ill could you say of him, Dame ?

EGGA.

Ill ? O, a plenty, a plenty : who but he hinders us all from biding contentedly under any other outlandish king that wills to come and rule us ? Who but he exasperates your wealthy voyagers from Daneland, (rich gentlefolk hung about with links

o' gold too,) driving them to burn down our homesteads and haply roast us inside, when they come to pay us a neighbourly visit, and find Alfred's England so little willing to be hospitable? Who but this glory-craving king of our's, with his royal rights and revenues, his gracious grandeurs, that only signify a narrow-hearted selfish——

ALFRED.

No, Dame! he fights not for his single self
But for his People,—for their liberties,
Their laws, religion,—

EGGA.

Stop you there, religion quotha! What's your dull prayer-mongering worship to compare with the feasts of old Thor and Woden, and the pleasures of Asgard, and the Asen and the Valhal and Valkyrrior, I'd like to know? Ay, ay, young man,—the Skalds ha' taught us enough, and well enough, I wot. Our old country gods be more terrible than your new 'uns. And—as for laws and liberties,—Saturn save us from them both, and let us hatch our eggs peaceably! There now, mind thou well yon batch o' cakes, young man, and turn 'em on the hearth when they're a-browning: and I must go water the cattle, and feed the pigs awhile. [*she goes out.*]

ALFRED,

(alone,—rises slowly, and speaks mournfully.)

Heaven grant me patience! Can they sink so low
And still be counted men and Englishmen,—
That liberties are nothing, good laws nothing,
Religion nothing,—so they may keep peace
And hatch in shame and sin their golden eggs!
O, this is bitterness: my noble people,
With those false magnates leading them astray,
Their true king lost,—my sheep without a shepherd,
Infected with this rot of canting love
To welcoming the wolves within their sheepfold!
It hath been something to have lost this day,
And dared the scoff of craven by my flight:
Yet did I dare it—even this—for England!

And I have hidden those my royal robes
 Hastily in the thicket, where I found
 One of my noble archers lying dead,—
 And so I borrowed these old gearn of his
 To clothe withal my shaméd majesty.
 Yet,—all for such!—if such can be true sample,—
 A nation like this boor and his old shrew,
 Who heed their crops but not the Mother-land,
 Loving their country less than they love cattle,
 Despising their great birthright liberty
 Ready to sell it for a mess of pottage,
 Scorning the grace of equitable laws,
 Scoffing in misbelief at true religion,
 And for invaders leaving their fall'n king,—
 O, this is bitterness!

—But, no, no, no!

My People, England,—thou art not as these,—
 My generous noble dear devoted People!
 Had there been only weapons in your hands
 True as the hands that should have wielded them,
 These fierce sea-robbers never had set foot
 Upon our sacred shore,—or, once flung there
 As jetsam in a storm, had never found
 A grave beyond the beach!

Enter EGGA from behind.

How now?—what, amouthing again! How's the manchets?
 —Whew—they're cinders!—why, thou poor harlotry play-actor,
 be this thy way o' winning bread? to burn the manchets, and all
 for a spell o' speech-making?—Out on thee, thriftless!

[she offers to strike him.]

[Enter ETHELNOTH and HEReward with the neatherd.]

WULF.

Here, this way, mighty captains, here's our archer.

ETHELNOTH.

O king, O blessed hour!

HEREWARD.

England's darling !

[they kneel: EGGA, bustling up and peering at them all curiously.]

EGGA.

How ? be'st thou the king,—the great, the glorious, the good king Alfred ? Nay, nay, but we'll build thee up a throne ; hither, goodman, the bolster and the pillows ! (ye're an earl or an alderman at the least, fool !) quick, fool, quick with the pillows.

ALFRED *(mournfully)*.

Is any left with you to call me king ?
Have any more of English blood escaped
The murderous onset of the Dane ?

ETHELNOTH.

O king !

We love thee, England loves thee, and thy name
Is as a tower of strength ; for God and thee
All England lives !

ALFRED.

Yet,—have they not made peace,
A shameful peace with this invading Dane ?

HEREWARD.

Only the rich and noble, for estates.

ALFRED.

Headman ! the commons with this deadly taint
Of loving peace instead of righteousness
Are touched ; I know it, feel it bitterly.

ETHELNOTH *(with warmth)*.

It is another race, another blood
Of alien feeling and an adverse faith.
Old England's heart is evermore with thee
Her king, her best of kings, her longtime darling ;
We are for Alfred : but there is a folk
That antedates the coming of our good

And heeds of even thee as new and strange,
 Hating and plotting, though they cringe like serfs ;
 Let such dream on. For England and for thee
 Are we, and (Heaven forgive us !) all good men,
 The generous common-people, honest hearts,
 The true, the sturdy, the keensighted class
 That midway judges England, and commands
 All higher and all lower to love Alfred !

ALFRED.

Amen ! for God, and Alfred, God's poor servant :
 I will, He willing, live and dare and die
 For only England : but, my patriot friends,
 What sign is there of such a loyal spirit
 When not alone the lords fall to this Dane,
 But even the commons be a trifle touched
 For merchandize and hatching of their eggs,
 What sign of hope, if thus the nation leans
 Against their liberties and laws and me ?

ETHELNOTH (*vehemently*).

They hang on thee, great Alfred ! Never yet
 (And for a thousand years shall this be true,)
 Have Englishmen or England striven against
 The strong incline their Alfred sloped for them !
 Thou hast invented Liberty for England ;
 Thou hast forged Law : thy veriest fantasies
 Have stood religious doctrines for all England :
 The twelve wellsworn that judge of life and death,
 The schoolread bishop, and the parish-priest,
 The unbribed judge, the prisoner's advocate,
 Lieutenants, sheriffs, bailiffs, constables,
 The coroners for innocence or crime,
 The watchers on the highway, and the wards
 Who feed the poor by largesse of the rich
 All are of Alfred : yea, and more than so, —
 Our armies levied by thy providence, —
 Our navies, that do sentinel the ports
 And guard (with angels in their tops) against
 Invading foemen, — these are all of Alfred !
 O King, we never can forget our Alfred !

ALFRED (*devoutly*).

To Heaven the praise, where praise is justly due.
And thanks to you, friends, for this timely comfort.
Believe me, never shall despair of England
Weaken this arm, or paralyse this heart
Or cloud the brow of God's anointed.

Listen ; (*in a low voice*)

[WULF and EGGA have been whispering together and are
creeping out.

We must hie hence at speed : yon Celtic serf
Discerning his advantage in our need
(Look how he mutters with his mate) forthwith
Will sell us to the Dane,—

ETHELNOTH.

My dagger's point [*drawing a dagger*.
Frees thee and us from danger !

ALFRED (*solemnly*).

Ethelnoth !

I do rebuke thee for that thought of shame ;
Put up thy murderous sting, and let them live.
To slay our open enemies afield
Hotblooded for the right in self-defence
Seemeth necessity, though sore and sad :
But thus to steal a march on Providence
(That willeth only good and through good means)
By sheer assassination in cold blood
For selfish safety, is—with God, a crime,
With men, an utter folly, Ethelnoth.
No : we must hence at once, and secretly ;
My diadem and mace and royal cloak,
Cerdic's own mace, and Egbert's diadem,
We first, with backward step (to spoil the scent)
Must strait reclaim from yonder tangled thicket ;
Thence, doubling on our track, to—

Follow me.

ETHELNOTH.

Lead on, good King, we live to follow thee !

END OF ACT I.

[The music between this Act and the Second may include the old English airs of "From merciless invaders," and "The brave men of Kent," &c., with perhaps the modern one of "Hard Times, come again no more."]

ACT II.

SCENE I.

The outer room of a cottage in the fortified marsh of Athelney. ALFRED'S harp hanging up; and a time-candle on the mantel of a hearth, near which is a settle-like table and stools. EDWARD and ETHELWARD, the boyprinces, are making a toyboat, with a little bow and arrows near them and a paper kite, &c.: sordidly dressed, as in distress, and looking hungry; playing not for pleasure but for employment: perhaps one reading a missal, or writing on a board.

BERTHA discovered comforting QUEEN ELSWITHA, who is crying over a little curlyheaded 3-year-old daughter: and a large mastiff in the room.

BERTHA.

Dear heart, take comfort; hope for brighter days
The likelier to dawn upon us now
For this long night of sorrows,—nay, my Queen,
My sister, do not weep so.

ELSWITHA (*sobbing violently.*)

—For the children

My Alfred's darlings, England's royal stock,
Mated with poverty, pale, hungerbitten,
O Bertha, Bertha!

BERTHA.

He will soon come back,—
And bring back happiness and plenty with him;
He hath but gone a little while and way
To get (and Heaven is kind) a little food,—
And he had hope to meet some score of friends,
Some brave and worthy men of Somerset,
Who have got clue to us at Athelney:

Cheer up, dear Sister-Queen,—

ELSWITHA (*listening intently*).

Hark ! that's his step,
I know my Alfred's step among a thousand !
[*she runs to meet him at the door, which is central.*]

ALFRED.

How are the children, wife ?—what, crying eyes ?
Nay, but I come to kiss the tears away :
Love,—have no fears—for He who fed the ravens
Careth for us,—lo now, wife, wine and bread !
A noble friend hath spared us from his need
(A noble friend in own extremity
Yet did I make him eat and drink himself)
Hath spared me—(it was for the children's sake
And yours', dear wife and sister)—bread and wine :
Look, this half loaf and flask,—Thanks be to God !
Here, Edward, eat, my boy,—drink, Ethelward.
Take some, dear wife, dear sister,—

ELSWITHA.

Not until
Thy precious lips have blessed the precious food :
Alfred, not I, but England bids thee take
All that her widowed poverty hath left
To feast her King withal !

ALFRED.

One morsel, wife,
For England's dearest sake and thine,—one drop.
Now, feast, my darlings ! Nay—it was our bargain.
And, Edward, hither ! hither, Ethelward,—
Come to the better bread, for, starved in knowledge
A man, an Englishman, is starved indeed :
Come, pretty ones ;—see, I have found some nuts,
A squirrel's hoard in an old hazel-stem,
To share between my lads for doing well
Their reading and their writing :—hither, boys.

[*he teaches them at the table : ELSWITHA and BERTHA
come to him with the bread and wine.*]

ELSWITHA.

Now, dearest Alfred, eat.

BERTHA.

Come, king and brother,
A little wine, for thou art very faint.

ALFRED.

Well, an ye will, my treasures :

[he eats and drinks a little. A knocking at the closed door startles them all. BERTHA runs to see before ALFRED has prevented her.]

Hark ! who knocks ?

Stop, sister !—O the brave and venturous girl !

BERTHA,

(throwing the door open, and discovering a whiteheaded and picturesque old man.)

It seems a poor old beggar, very old
And very poor, and famishing, he says,
And praying in the holy name of Christ
A bit of bread.

ALFRED.

Here, sister, give him this.

[ALFRED gives BERTHA the remainder loaf and flask.]

ELSWITHA *(running up)*.

What, this, this—husband ? all, our little all ?
Think of the children and to-morrow,—this ?
Why, this is all we trust to for to-morrow !

ALFRED *(looking upward)*.

Wife,—for to-morrow I have trusted God !
He is our Help to-morrow as to-day ;
And if to-day doth bring a duty close,
We must fulfil it, trusting for the morrow.
Here, my poor gaffer, eat,—nay, eat it—drink.

[gradually, as as he speaks, the backscene changes, and to ALFRED'S mute astonishment (no one else seeing anything of this,—for BERTHA and ELSWITHA are

taken up by watching ALFRED'S entrancement, and the boys are happy over their nuts and toys, &c.) "the Vision" comes, with distant supernatural music, shewing the old man changed into the Guardian Spirit of England blessing ALFRED, but nothing said: only music. As it fades away, and the cottage wall comes back again,—

ALFRED (*in an awed whisper*).

Is this a dream? O wife, O sister, speak!
Tell me, my boys; who saw it,—and who heard?

ELSWITHA (*earnestly embracing him*).

Husband, sweet Alfred, do not look so wild,—
This is some feverish ecstasy of hunger
Such as St. Simeon and those eremites
Took to be gleams of heaven. Eat, love, eat!

BERTHA,

(*runs to the door for the food, and in astonishment calls out,*)

O sister, what a miracle! look, brother,
The loaf is whole, the pitcher is abrim!

ALFRED (*slowly*).

Elijah,—David! I do see in this
Your God and mine; I, the anointed King
And Prophet of my people, take of Him
The blessed food his mercy giveth me.

[*he tastes a little,—as also do the children and BERTHA and ELSWITHA, and they give pieces to the dog. Then ELSWITHA speaks.*]

ELSWITHA.

Dear husband, rest awhile, for thou art wearied
And hast the eyes of one who seeth visions:
Rest thee, and go to sleep, love. [*a child cries within.*
There's the babe
Calling me: Bertha, bring the boys away, [*in a low voice.*
And let him sleep:—nay, thou canst leave the hound:
Dear Gael, most faithful friend!—there, lie thee down!
To be our Alfred's royal bodyguard.

[they go to the inner room at side door: and as ALFRED is just reclined on a rude couch of skins, a distant bugle is heard, which startles him, then it sounds nearer and louder, and then ETHELNOTH and HEReward run in at centre door. He starts up.]

ETHELNOTH.

Good news, O King! Five hundred at our backs,
Noble, though lowly, patriot Englishmen,
Armed as they best could make or muster weapons,
But sturdily resolved to play the men
Have found thee out with us.

ALFRED.

How dost thou find me?

We missed each other suddenly and strangely,
Hunted and well-nigh taken: since that hour
Hither escaped where I had stowed my treasures,
I have lain close, for many foes are nigh:
Lain close, and well-nigh starved: how did'st thou find me?

ETHELNOTH.

One that hath lately (and we found him dying)
Shared his last loaf with England, seeing us
And knowing us to stand for thee and thine,
Told me—(it was his blessed thought at death)
That he had saved the King! he would not tell
Alfred himself that he discovered him
Lest that the King should seek elsewhere for safety;
For well the good man trusted, under God,
This labyrinthine quagmired Athelney
As Alfred's surest refuge: so he stayed,
And never told the King that he was known.

ALFRED.

A gentleman, a glorious Englishman!
Heaven give him rest,—didst thou not say he died?
But, but that passes.

England and five hundred !
 Gideon had fewer men at Meroval !
 —Is the foe near, the Dane ?

HEREWARD.

At Ethandune ;
 With scores, alas, of England's false great lords
 Playing the courtiers to King Guthrom there.

ALFRED.

How many seem the foe ? stand they prepared ?

HEREWARD.

I wot not : it were easy for the birds
 To oversee their strength, but beyond hope
 For us that creep afoot.

ALFRED (*after a pause of thought*).

I am resolved.

Ethelnoth, rest thou here with Hereward,—
 And those five hundred,—how are they provisioned ?

ETHELNOTH.

Well : for we drove in herds of cattle with us.

ALFRED (*earnestly*).

Non Nobis Domine !—Yes, Ethelnoth !
 To know aright the blessedness of plenty
 A man must once have felt how hunger gnaws.
 For those five hundred, thank them heartily
 And bless them from their King : guard well my Queen,
 Guard the dear children, England's royal Princes :
 And I the while will see and gauge this Dane.

ETHELNOTH (*falling on one knee*).

O King, be sparing of that precious life
 In which all England lives, and with thee dies :
 I know thy countless courage ; well I know
 That thou against ten thousand would'st advance
 Alone, and in thy spirit battle down
 Their myriad host,—yet is the body something,
 This wretched, hungry, weak and crushable body,—
 O King, trust not to that !

[BERTHA comes in unseen and quietly through the side door.

ALFRED (*raising him kindly*).

I trust in God ;

And, under Him, in Mind, and in my Right.

Hearken, good Ethelnoth : I have some skill

In harping and our national melodies :

And, with disguise, (this is no lie, but wisdom)

[*he takes down his harp,*

I will search out this Dane in his own camp,

Will there discern his powers, judge my false lords

Whose love of peace—the craven hypocrites !—

Hath betrayed England,—and will know the time

When my five hundred shall recover England !

HEREWARD.

A great good thought, and worthy of our King.

For us, depend ; nothing in earth or hell,

While one of us is living, shall do harm,

Shall not do good, to Cerdic's royal stock :

[BERTHA retires.

The Queen, the Princes, and the Crown are safe.

Go then, great Alfred ! go, without a care

And test the Dane : all blessing on thee there.

[*they all go out through the central door.*

BERTHA runs in, ELSWITHA following slowly.

BERTHA.

He's gone !—I wot not whither ; took his harp

And spake of some disguise.

ELSWITHA.

Gone ? left us, sister ?

BERTHA.

In charge of yonder gallant gentlemen,—

And he is gone alone to seek the Dane.

ELSWITHA.

O brave, rash, noble deed!—nay, let me go,
I'll follow him, and guard him with my prayers
His ministering angel under Heaven,—
Some ill might else befall,—

BERTHA.

And leave the children?

ELSWITHA.

Ah, sister! when a mother and a wife
Hath to elect between her little ones
And him who made them hers, marvel thou not
If in the wrestling anguish of her soul
She choose her husband!—Bertha,—let me go,—

BERTHA.

I, I will go: see here, I have my cloak,—
And hark, the baby is awake and wants thee!

ELSWITHA.

My precious!—Bertha,—nay, thou shalt not go,—
Ah me,—my very heart is torn in twain!
Stay with the children!

BERTHA.

But the babe, dear sister,—
Think of its asking mouth, its little face
Pining with hunger, if thou wert away;
The path is perilous, and may be long,
And those marauders—

[*she runs off.*]

ELSWITHA (*calling after her.*)

Sister—stay!—Brave girl,
She's gone or e'er I was aware; O Heaven,
Shield her, and him, and these!

My precious babe,
Dear Alfred's fairest, last, and best-beloved,—

[*she sobs broken-heartedly and the Act ends.*]

(*The music between this Act and the Third may include hints of the tunes, "Home, sweet home," and "There's a good time coming," &c.*)

ACT III.

SCENE I.

A wood. Enter ALFRED in a brown cowled habit, with a white beard, and his harp. A good Welch harper close behind the scene must play to his pantomime. Some Danish outposts come along, and he pleases them with his martial bardic tunes, such as "Men of Harlech," and the like. After a tune or two he addresses them, in an old man's voice—

ALFRED.

Is this the track to Guthrom's camp, good folk ?

[one offers to take his harp, &c.]

Nay, friend, I've nought for pillage but this harp ;

If thou canst play upon it, take it,—or

My skill shall go along with it and thee,—

Haply thy fellows there may like my songs.

[he plays spiritedly to their great admiration, they crowd round him, and one of them cries out—

Ay, bring him on to the camp ; come along, old bones.

[they all follow, leaving the scene empty. BERTHA comes in timidly.]

BERTHA.

I heard his harp : I'm sure it was his harp.

O what a dreary place for evil beasts

And evil men to lurk in—Heaven protect me !

[more marauders come in, meeting her tumultuously : she battling down fear, courageously addresses their gruff black-bearded chief.]

BERTHA.

Sir, did a harper pass this way ?

SIDROC.

Surely, pretty one ;—
They've ta'en him with his harping to the camp :
Curse all these fellows,—had I been alone—

BERTHA.

Wilt take me thither too ? I sing with him.

SIDROC.

Ay, ay, come on with me.

*[The others crowd round ; he eyes them savagely ; and they
jeer him, saying—*

What ? all for one ?

Ha ! ha ! No, Sidroc ! we are coming too !

BERTHA (*cheerfully*).

Thanks ! I can sing you many pretty songs,—
One now, friends, if ye list.

*[she sings, to the tune of Codiad yr haul, or “ the rising
Sun,” a well-known old British bardism.*

Corydon, Corydon, whither away ?
Come along, come along, list to my lay,
I can sing merrily,
Happily, cherrily,
I can sing merrily night and day !
Glad goes innocent cheerfulness,
Walking unharm'd amid perils and tearfulness,
Steadily onward, in spite of her fearfulness,
Trusting in Heaven as well as she may !

Corydon,—Corydon !—where can'st thou be ?
Why art thou cruelly hiding from me ?
Though I sing cherrily
Happily, merrily,
Yet am I verily sad for thee !
Woe's me ! while I smile cheerfully,
Yet am I wandering timidly, tearfully,
Hearken, my Corydon !—hearken how fearfully
Thee am I calling,—ah, where can'st thou be ?

[the rough Danes are enchanted, and raising her in triumph on their locked shields, four of them, they shout,

A prize for the Viking himself, and worth a gold bracelet to every man of us!

*[and so they carry her off admiringly and exultingly ;
SIDROC following, looking black.*

SCENE II.

A splendid perspective scene of the Danish encampment, with all characteristic appointments : in the distance is heard ALFRED'S harp, and acclamations. The Viking's magnificent pavilion at side, full of renegade English lords, Danish chiefs, and GUTHROM throned in the midst. After a pause, the Danish marauders of last scene bring in BERTHA on their shields in tumultuous joy, shouting—

A prize for the Viking! A goddess for the Viking!

Beautiful as Freja! melodious as Iduna!

GUTHROM (*to BERTHA, as she is set down at his footstool by the kneeling Danes.*)

If any one of these hath harmed thee, maiden,
Speak fearlessly.

BERTHA.

Not one my lord, not one.

GUTHROM (*to a Danish official.*)

Chancellor, give them largesse handsomely.

[he gives them each a gilt armlet, which they wear proudly.

Now, maiden, canst thou sing some country song,
To cheer and soothe us after all this fighting?

BERTHA,

(hearing ALFRED'S harp, while he approaches midway up the scene).

There is a harper yon; I sing with him.

Voices.

The harper, the harper! take him to the Viking.

[*they recognise each other, and sing together before the lords and GUTHROM: tune, Codiad Yr Hedydd, "the rising of the lark:" BERTHA sings to the harp music,*

Cease, cease, thou warlike stranger!

From thy red career of danger

Rest, Viking, rest!

My unhappy fatherland, O thou loved and blighted shore,

May kind Heaven's gracious hand P'our upon us peace once more,

Son of Odin, let thy brand Soon be wreathed with olives o'er,—

Rest, Viking, rest!

Chief,—Prince,—all-conquering Leader!

Listen to a simple pleader,—

Spare my dear Land!

Mighty Viking, use thy power

Generously in conquest's day,

And consider that the hour

Of defeat—for come it may—

Yet may o'er thy banners lour

Then thy dread sword stay, Oh stay,—

Hold thy red hand!

[GUTHROM *looks and listens delightedly, as enchanted by her beauty and singing: meanwhile, it being full noon, a grand procession of skalds and priests, with hideous blood-stained idols and the sacred Raven banner winds up the camp to GUTHROM'S tent: where with prostrations he and all the Danes offer incense to the Raven and other idols; he then turns to ALFRED and BERTHA, astonished.*

GUTHROM.

Harper and maid!—a hymn, and bow the knee.

ALFRED.

We may not kneel before thy gods, O Viking;

Our's is another faith, and thy great mind

Tolerant, as true greatness ever is,

Will have respect to conscience: we dare not.

CHIEF SKALD.

Dare not? yet dare to disobey the Viking?
Kneel, or ye die.

ALFRED.

Then will we die, not kneel.

[GUTHROM *looks round at the English lords and whispers with them: the chief Skald approaches with a hieroglyphical scroll: he reads*

CHIEF SKALD.

The sentence in the Edda is distinct;
That men who will not worship Hilda's Raven
Be torn asunder by wild horses; women,
That they be burnt alive.

GUTHROM.

Now, maid and harper,
How answer ye to this? Can your god save you?

BERTHA.

He can, He will! we worship only Him.

[*to the tune of Ar hyd y nos, BERTHA sings,*
Not to those thine idols gory
Bend we the knee;
Only unto God the glory
Thus render we!
Unto him the whole creation
Brings from every tribe and nation
Glad and ceaseless adoration,
Praised be HE!
He alone is strong to save us,
Yea,—and He will!
Or, the lives His mercy gave us
His shall be still,—
And in glories never-ending
Will our spirits yet be blending
Praises evermore ascending
His holy hill!

[GUTHROM *is entranced more and more, but an English lord beside him says,*

The brainless fanatics,—why can't they kneel?

GUTHROM (*turning on him fiercely.*)

Thou recreant to thy country and thy creed!
Be silent in these holy presences:
I honour this young maiden, this old man,
For honouring their god. Yet must they die
For thinking scorn of our's. Maid, canst thou bear
The fierce flame gnawing at thy living flesh
Awrithe in that terrific agony,
And all to please some—let us say some god
Like Hilda's Raven?—Would I had such faith.

ALFRED.

Viking, the God we serve created all things,
He is the glorious spirit of all worlds,
Made thee, and me, and feedeth men and ravens;
We worship our Creator and our Judge.

GUTHROM (*alarmed*),

Our Judge?—Will the Creator be our Judge?

ALFRED.

All that is done on earth in thought or deed
Riseth again for judgment: evil then
Is doomed to endless dying, endless hate;
Good lives the life of everlasting love.

GUTHROM (*musingly*)

These words are new, and of strange force. But, maiden,
Canst thou endure the fire on this fair flesh,
Thy body's utter anguish? Ay, and first
Endure like anguish of the feeling heart
To see thy grandsire there torn by wild horses,
Rather than bend the knee one easy minute?

BERTHA.

The pain is terrible I know, my lord;
And yet more terrible to see another
In extreme torment; yet, I will not kneel.

[the Priests and Skalds crowd round and lay hold of them : then suddenly and determinedly, as convinced after a struggle,

GUTHROM.

Release them, Skalds and Priests!—they shall not die :
A constancy like this must have its root
In a true faith : I will not tempt their God.
Give them safe conduct through the lines.

[ALFRED and BERTHA bow to GUTHROM, whose eye follows them with interest, as they are honourably escorted up the camp by the armletted party of Danes. The idol procession goes away at side hurriedly and angrily ; then

GUTHROM.

Who's here ?

[WULF the neatherd, is dragged before the presence as a spy.

WULF.

Ay, bring me to the king, I say : nay now, don't buffet me, mates : I'm no spy, but an honest true Briton, wishing well to everybody ; like those noble gentry yonder who are all for peace and good King Guthrom. He's the strongest now, so he's my king.

GUTHROM.

Why this disturbance, fellow ? what's your errand ?

[WULF drops ridiculously on his knees, dumb-founded.

GUTHROM.

Speak, sirrah !—not this pantomime.

WULF.

I can't.—

I had a speech o'my tongue, but I've forgot it,—
I, I,—O yes ! I'll tell you where he is,—
He's hiding in my hovel handy to us,
Or was there twelve hours back ; only my wife
Thinking to get here first and clutch the gold
(A thousand links—a thousand links, they tell me !)

Lock'd me i'th cowhouse, till I well nigh starved,—
O here she comes to tell us all about it.

GUTHROM.

What means this dull buffoon? Who's in his hovel?

WULF.

King Alfred!—I, I—crave your royal pardon,
Alfred, *not* King: at least he should be there.

[EGGA, *the neatherd's wife, is pulled in by the Danish soldiers.*

EGGA.

There now, adone! adone! why the camp followers ha' been
tumbling me about all night and morning, and I couldn't get anigh
your great royalty to tell you sooner; but it's true,—he's a brown-
quilted archer and burnt my manchets.

GUTHROM.

Go with this beldame, some of you, and search:
Bring Alfred back,—they shall have golden links;
But, if he have escaped through their contentions,
They shall be hung,—their links will then be iron.

[EGGA *is hurried out: WULF remains in custody, looking
ridiculously miserable; meanwhile*

GUTHROM.

The fugitive must then be near us still;
I hoped him slain; but among all those thousands
Narrowly as we searched, he was not found.
So, seeing our camp, after this victory
Is safe and fearless without one foe nigh,
Captain,—proclaim a general holiday,
That all our soldiers search the country round
(Saving our royal body-guard alone)
And so take two days license foraging.

[*great huzzaing in the camp, an ovation to GUTHROM,
and the Third Act ends.*

(*The interlude music to include "Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven's
gate sings," and "Hearts of oak," &c.*)

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The earthworks outside the royal hovel in the marshes of Athelney: with sentinels, and ÆTHELNOTH with HEReward looking out: a sentinel, in the distance, calmly says,—

I see a harper coming,—and a girl.

ÆTHELNOTH (*with fervour*),
Thank heaven! it is the King!

HEReward (*calling at the cottage window*),
Safe, safe! the King!

[QUEEN ELSWITHA and the Children run out, and all are eagerly crowding to the distant parapet, looking out, and waving hands; the QUEEN kneeling, and looking up gratefully. After a pause, ALFRED mounts over the parapet, where he flings off his disguise, and lays down his harp,—BERTHA behind him.

ALFRED (*exultingly*).
Now give me my five hundred!

[*the boys run up to him.*
Father!
and the QUEEN still on her knees.
My husband!

[*a touching tableau, ALFRED in the midst: he looks up, and then affectionately round on all, and then speaks, tenderly,*

My wife,—my little ones,—my noble friends!
(*they shout.*)

God save the King!

ETHELNOTH (*on one knee*).

O thou art greater now,
More glorious far, in this dark time of trial,
Than even when on Ashdune's crimson field
Thou stood'st a conqueror crown'd!

ALFRED.

Hearken, my friends,—
Good Providence, or He whose name that is,
Hath sped me on my way;—and Bertha too,
Brave sister, daring that most hideous risk,—

BERTHA.

How gladly did I stand beside thee, brother;
And, but that I had gone, Elswitha here
Had even left the babe for love of thee!

ALFRED.

Dear wife! Oh what a happy, tender name,
When those that bear that name are such as thou!
Obedient, gentle, loving, sensible,—
But,—Ethelnoth! My soldiers! Hereward!
This night, my Ethelnoth, this happy night,—
Hereward, speak,—are my five hundred sure?

HEREWARD.

All staunch and true; men that have burning wrongs
And pine to quench them, with inveterate hate,
Like hissing torches in the blood of foes,—
Men that love thee and England,—

ALFRED.

I could wish
To hear the love of England and her King
Set far before a craving for revenge,—
But this may pass, good Hereward; my five hundred,
Let them be ready at sunset, armed, provisioned,
(They drove in cattle with them, I remember,)
And, sometime after midnight, from the Dane
Secure, and scattered in the villages,
As taking license after victory,

We, creeping through the woodlands, will regain
At Ethandune what Chippenham had lost.

Take this, Friend;

[he gives to HEReward the Alfred jewel.]

Wear it as a badge of honour:

Take this too, Ethelnoth;—

[he gives him a ring.]

Let it be an heirloom.

Would I were richer to reward your zeal,—

And soon I shall be, friends, and will remember.

Bid my five hundred eat their fill, and sleep;

See to their weapons; and anon will I

Speak with them each, and thank them: now, away!

[they and the sentinels go out, leaving ALFRED'S family alone.]

ALFRED.

Queen,—since that sacred meal, the unbroken loaf,

The empty pitcher marvellously abrim,

And that bright vision seen of none but me,

I have stood strong in hope, a hope assured

That this right-hand shall yet recover England!

To-night I take no leave of thee, dear love,

Though I am off at sunset to the Dane,—

For in the morning thou shalt set the crown

On my victorious head at Ethandune.

One kiss:—and now to gladden my five hundred!

[they all go out.—Scene changes.]

SCENE II.

A narrow strip of country: enter stragglingly from both sides a multitude of the English, variously armed, as to a rendezvous and bivouac; they lie down in picturesque groups and talk and eat together: then one speaks to his mates.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Ay, if our great ones only trusted England

And weren't so jealous of us, so suspicious,

We had been round five-hundred-thousand good,
And not this poor five hundred.

SECOND.

We're enow
King Alfred may well reckon for a million.

THIRD.

Nay, but it's bitter grief and burning shame
They held us back, and would not let us muster,
And kept the arsenals close,—when willing hands,
Good able hands with stout hearts at their root,
Had swept off clean this seascum of invaders !

FIRST SOLDIER.

Our great ones (how unlike the King himself,—
He wears a heart!) are all too grand, too cold,
Too wrapt in phrases and in courtesies,
Too hand-in-hand with other foreign great ones,
Too deep in pleasures, or in politics,
To feel for England's wrongs, or fear her peril.
They muster troops,—we paying for their levy,—
All to protect themselves, and tread us down ;
And lest our indignation should break loose
Against their shameful truckling to the foe
They snub our patriot zeal, keep us disarmed,
And give us over to the wolf like sheep !
But look,—the King !

[*They get up quickly and range themselves :* ALFRED
enters armed, with ETHELNOTH *and* HEReward.]

ALFRED.

God bless you, my five hundred !
I come to thank you in His name, and England's !
I come to lead you on to certain victory,
To help you win your rights, and quench your wrongs,
Conquering Liberty once more for England !
O friends, O countrymen, my band of heroes,
We now go forth, prepared and resolute men,

Assured of one thing,—we *must*, we *will* conquer !

(*they shout*)

We will, we will, God save the good King Alfred !

ALFRED.

Yet mark me : all must steadily obey,
Each at his post. Ethelnoth,—Hereward,—
That these my brave intelligent Englishmen
May work our plan, they all must comprehend it ;
Confidence in my people is my generalship.
Listen, good men ; more gladly, then, obey.
The Dane, some eight miles off, at Ethandune,
Revels in gluttonous security,
And all is heedless license in the camp.
The full moon rises two hours after midnight ;
And, in the dead of dark, their drunken sleep,
We will surround, surprise, and overwhelm them.
Hereward, tell our men by fifties off,
Ten companies : ye know your country, mates,—

Voices.

Ay, ay, every track and byeway : every inch of it.

ALFRED.

In single file wind through the devious woods,
Avoiding villages,—and flanked by scouts.
Each company, elect its separate leader,
To follow and obey him, and keep silence.
Now, Ethelnoth, take first your chosen fifty,
Sweep widely to the north, and reach the camp
Eastwardly just at midnight. Hereward,
Take thou an opposite track through the morass,
And just at midnight touch the camp full south.
These other fifties, each at interval,
Close north and west and every point between :
And I, standing here last, will be there first
To attack the nearest foe. Thus well arrived
By steady combination silently,—
Let all be hushed in eager readiness,
Until ye hear my bugle ; then with shouts
“ Alfred and England,” fly upon the foe !

[*the bands march out, and as the last company is filing off they stop,—while ALFRED prays, standing,*
 O God of Christian England, hear her King :
 Spare, spare thy People, thine inheritance :
 Nerve us for combat : grant us victory :
 And, where invaders darken our white cliffs,
 As locusts in the whirlwind, scatter them !
 Let not the heathen have his wicked will,—
 But help the righteous cause. Amen. Amen. (*echoed by the men*),
*[and so they go out : and the scene slowly changes :
 all the stage being dark.*

SCENE III.

Midnight : the camp of the Danes, all asleep at their posts after a debauch of wine : the balefires nearly out, and all dark ; suddenly a sleeping Dane starts up, and calls to his comrades beside him.

Askytal ! Hubba ! Why, it was a dream—
 Is any wine left i' th' beaker ?—I've been dreaming,
 And woke in a foolish fright :—give us the wine,—
 I dreamt that Alfred and his men were on us !

HUBBA.

Coward ! to wake us up,—what if they were ?
 There, drain it, fool,—and off to sleep again.

[*slowly, through the darkness, from the back and sides, steal in ALFRED and his Captains and their companies, quietly guard every tent and sleeping man, and especially surround GUTHROM'S tent, and the Lords and Jarls lying about in different attitudes of sottish sleep, with beakers and flagons, &c. beside them. Then ALFRED pulls aside GUTHROM'S tent-curtain,—a light hanging within shewing him asleep on a couch,—and suddenly blows an alarm on his bugle ! Instantly they raise the warshout,—“ Alfred and England ;” there is everywhere confusion, separate battles, all being overpowered, a picturesque military tableau,—and ALFRED master of the position : he speaks.*

ALFRED.

Guthrom,—give order that they drop their weapons :
 We will not spare one man in arms against us,
 Nor slaughter the defenceless ! Drop that mace.

GUTHROM (*unwillingly, and folding his arms*).

I yield me.—Captain of my bodyguard,—
 What, lying in drunken slumber ? Hew him down !
 Thanks, Sidroc ! Lo,—great Alfred, we are thine.
 [*they throw down their weapons in a heap.*]

ALFRED.

Now, Viking, quick with us ; the morning dawns,
 I have a tryste to keep before 'tis day :
 Come on. For you,—O you base English lords,—
 How despicable !—bind them fast with chains,
 These Danish fetters handy, suitable,—
 Ethelnoth, see not one of them escapes :
 Hereward,—make our other prisoners sure :
 We will deal justice with the rising sun,
 Justice and Mercy. On, to Ethandune !

[*as the moon rises over the empty camp, they all go
 out, leaving a bright picturesque desolation of
 weapons and beakers, and moonlit deserted
 pavilions, and so closes Act IV.*]

(*Interlude music to be suggestive of "Come if you dare," "The
 land, boys, we live in," or "See the conquering hero comes," &c.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

A dungeon, and GUTHROM fettered.

GUTHROM.

Alone! with crimes and conscience left alone!
And those Berserkir demons of remorse
Hunting me like a pack of famished wolves,—
And Death upon the threshold,—watching there
Cold and deliberate with his serpent eyes,—
Not as when in the glorious battle shock
Exultingly I've dared him to the face,
And on the torrent of my boiling blood
Whirl'd him aside with scorn,—but waiting here
Gaunt, grisly, dreadful:—and then, after death,
What said that harper, Judgment?—endless woe
For evil?—I am evil.

*[a long pause, while he paces about despairingly, and then
clasps on high his fettered hands,*

O Great Judge,
Unknown, and angered by the thousand crimes
Memory sees, a crowd of haunting ghosts,
Fearful, inevitable,—O Great Judge
Forgive, if yet Thou canst, forgive, forgive!

[the rough Dane burst into a paroxysm of tears.

What, tears!—Can Guthrom, this bloodthirsty Viking
The scourge of nations, be a child again?
Ah me! for once he was a little child
Innocent, happy,—but the guilty man
Hath never wept till now these thirty years:
O to be like that little child again!

[he paces about despairingly.

Would I could have yon maiden's martyr-faith !
 Not all the heroes of our whole Valhalla
 Had half the courage of that noble girl :
 She feared not death, sure of some better life,
 Nor shrunk from pain,—the speechless pain of fire—
 Because her wondrous god would quench the flame
 With rivers of supernal joy and peace.
 O faith, O light,—when can ye come to me ?

[he sits down, and covers his face with his hands. Enter the GAOLER.]

GAOLER.

Prisoner, I'm come to knock your fetters off.

GUTHROM (*resolutely*).

'Tis well : unmanacled I march to death.

GAOLER.

The King is close at hand, and cometh hither,
 And none but traitors may be chained before him.

[he knocks them off.]

GUTHROM (*musingly*).

And this is noble too : this generous Alfred,
 This type—(I do repent)—of generous England,
 Spared me, even me the ruthless brigand-chief,
 Spared, when he might have killed me in my sleep,
 And, now that I must die by law and right,
 Comes like a man for equal speech with me :
 I'll meet him like a king—whom I have wronged.

[ALFRED in royal costume comes in alone,—the gaoler going away at a sign : GUTHROM falls at his feet.]

GUTHROM.

I do not kneel to ask my life of thee,
 Great, injured, noble Alfred ! let me die
 At once, and cruelly, as I deserve :
 But I am bold to ask a higher boon,—
 Before I die, O King,—to be forgiven !

[*suddenly enter BERTHA, the gaoler preceding, and guards following. GUTHROM exclaims in astonishment,*

The maid ! the martyr-maid !—Wast thou the harper ?

ALFRED,

Yes, Guthrom : and we come to thank thee here,
For that thy noble nature, under Heaven,
Saved us so bravely in our utmost need ;
Viking, I give thee life, and set thee free,—
Rise, Guthrom !

GUTHROM (*quite overcome*).

Let me kneel ! Thy glorious creed
That makes a man and woman more than gods,
O teach me, teach me ! It were life indeed
To live and be like Alfred !

ALFRED (*raising him kindly*).

Come with us,—
I note the dawn of happiness to thee :
For Faith, a nobler faith than thou hast known,
Is knocking as an angel at thy heart ;
And Hope hath whispered comfort in thine ear ;
And Love doth light thine eyes,—

Come thou with us,
For we will do thee good.

Set forward, guards.

[*they all go out and the scene changes.*

SCENE II.

A narrow strip of a wood.

Enter slowly and ruefully WULF and EGGA.

WULF.

Why, I'm all over weals and bruises, old 'ooman.

EGGA.

Well, an't that better than hanging? I'm sure I never thought they'd ha' let us off so lightly. Ugh,—but they've battered me too, and it's worse to bear than the rheumatics. Howsomdever, it's a comfort to think one isn't hung.

WULF.

Ha,—there's a twinge,—bide a bit, won't ye?—I can't budge quicker than this: whew! but how my back aches: and I don't know which foot to put before the other! O, how those heavy little whips did cut round, to be sure: why, I'm ringed and spotted all over my body like a snake: Ha,—that we'd never meddled with that archer,—Ugh—

EGGA.

But it's a comfort too, to think they didn't hang us, and so, goodman,—

[they slowly creep out. The scene changes.]

SCENE III.

The terrace-slip of a garden with flowers. Enter the PRINCESS BERTHA, gathering a nosegay and conversing with GUTHROM, who is splendidly apparelled, but not as hitherto in his war costume.

GUTHROM.

And thou hast given me life, as from the dead,
For hope is life,—this wonderful new hope
That I, even I, Heaven's bitterest enemy,
The fierce destroyer of this beautiful world,
The very curse of men—can be forgiven!
What thanks, what thanks to pay thee?

[he kneels.]

BERTHA (*raising him*).

Not to me,—

Rise, gentle brother (for thy new-born faith
Giveth thee that new name), kneel not to me,
But worship only Him whose name is Love,
Whose nature Mercy.

GUTHROM (*earnestly*).

Yet will I thank thee too,—
And, if I may not worship, let me wonder
Whether an angel can be good as thou
Or half so loveable !

BERTHA.

O noble sir,
I am myself but a young Christian maid,
And cannot teach thee as another might,
Arguing doubts, disputing controversies,
There be some holy men, our learned bishops—

GUTHROM.

Save me from holy men and learned bishops !
Save me from doubts, disputes, and controversy !
I am all faith ! what could another give me
Thou hast not given ? my heart is lit at thine,
My spirit is in bliss when thou art nigh,
Thou only be my teacher !—thou alone
Art unto me the beauty of holiness,
Thou art the better angel of my life,
And from thy blessed lips—

Forgive me, Princess !

[*suddenly checking himself.*

My traitorous tongue hath overta'en my heart,
I spake but as a little child might speak
In all the artless utterance of affection,
I am not what I was,—forgive me, Princess !

[*she gives him a flower, smiles on him and walks
away, he following admiringly.*

GUTHROM.

Ah,—might I dare to love thee ?—sweet, sweet rose.

[*he kisses the flower : and goes off. Scene changes.*

SCENE IV.

A narrow passage scene: these scenes serving to give time and space for the splendid elaboration of the last: a number of the English and Danish commonalty and soldiers pass along and talk together: among them SIDROC and the FIRST and SECOND SOLDIER of Scene 2, in Act IV.

FIRST SOLDIER (*addressing SIDROC*).

I suppose we are all bound alike towards Glastonbury, stranger?

SIDROC (*gloomily and surlily*).

Ay, ay—I take it we be; though its pity and shame to some of us. When Regnar Lodbrok hears 'o this at Asgard, how t'will ruffle the old seaking's spirit! A Viking of Daneland to cast off his country's gods!

SECOND SOLDIER.

I shoudn't like it any better than yourself, good wayfarer,—if they *were* gods at all,—and if in casting off his old skin, Guthrom didn't find a better under it. He's as changed a man, folks tell me,—as a butterfly might be from a caterpillar: quite tame and kindly like, in lieu of the bloody pirate.

SIDROC.

None 'o your hard names, stranger: however, I'm dumb, for all you've got the mastery again, and it's no good arguefying. Let's on to Glastonbury together, and see the show.

FIRST SOLDIER.

It's like to be a rare one. The Princess Bertha, with our good King Alfred himself, they say, will answer for the Viking at the font, and he's to drop his ugly Danish name for a better.

SIDROC (*gruffly*).

None of your hard——

SECOND SOLDIER.

It'll be a rare show any how: come along.

[*the scene changes.*

LAST SCENE.

The interior of Glastonbury Abbey, very splendid: just after GUTHROM has been baptized by the name of ATHELSTAN. A magnificent spectacle, with ALFRED, ELSWITHA, and all the court on one side, several being pardoned English lords and Danish Jarls; and on the other GUTHROM, habited in white and silver, with BERTHA near him, and others grouped about the Archbishop. Crowds of Danes and English, as in amicable union of the two nations, their flags and emblems mixed. After a pause, ALFRED in royal robes speaks from the throne.

ALFRED.

This blessed chrism, brother Athelstan,
 (For thy new nature claimeth a new name
 That Guthrom may forget his former self,)
 Hath made thee consecrate henceforth to Heaven,
 A worshipper of Him who made the worlds:
 Live as will best become that holy state.
 And, for I know how well she loves her convert
 Even as thou rejoicest in her teaching,
 That our dear sister Bertha still may teach thee,
 We give her to thee, Athelstan, to wife.

[he joins their hands, the Archbishop blessing.]

GUTHROM-ATHELSTAN (*with astonished delight*).

Gift beyond price! O bright and blessed day!
 Thou wondrous harper, that hast thrilled my heart,
 Touch'd with rare skill its every trembling string,
 Tuned all its discords to melodious love,
 And made me all athrob with ecstasy,—
 And thou, so beauteous,—yet more good than beauteous,
 More loved than either,—my high noon of bliss,
 O Princess, O great King,—what shall I say?
 My evil is so overcome of good
 And all my happiest hope more than fulfill'd
 I scarce can think it other than a dream,—
 All new and strange, yet all so gladly true!

Praises to God,—and to his servant Alfred,
 And sweetest thanks to thee, most dear, most noble,—
 My martyr!—I will be confessor now
 And stand the witness for thy God, and thee!

[he takes her hand, she smiling on him.]

ALFRED.

So shall we heal all woes, uniting nations.
 As for these English lords, sometime beguiled
 By specious texts and false humanities,
 But now themselves again, a little ashamed,
 I have forgiven them,—England shall forgive,
 If thus, O ye my noble People round me,
 You will take pattern by your English King;
 And, while you battle down invading foes,
 Can welcome a converted enemy.
 For never, saving as a guest and friend,
 Shall foreigner set foot on English ground;
 And never will that traitorous lust for peace,
 Dishonourable peace, the sleep of slaves,
 Outburn in English hearts their holier love
 Of Liberty, my People's heritage!

Rise, Queen! tomorrow will we set these nuptials.

*[as the royal procession goes out, the curtain falls slowly
 to the National Anthem.]*

THE END.

An Extract about "King Alfred's Character," from Charles Knight's "Popular History of England," vol. i., p. 114 :—

"The history of England during the days of Alfred has necessarily been the biography of one man ; for the character of one ruler never more completely influenced the destinies of his country. Alfred saved England from foreign domination. He raised her in the scale of nations, and maintained her in the fellowship of Christian communities. He was the first who clearly saw that there was a people to be instructed and civilized. He ruled over a small state, but his exertions had a world-wide influence. The Saxon people never forgot him. In three generations after his death, in the first year of the eleventh century, they were subdued by the same Danes that he had driven out ; and in another century came a greater conquest and a heavier yoke. But Alfred saved his own race from destruction ; and, whatever were to be the after-fortunes of that race, the indomitable courage, the religious endurance, the heart and hope of this man, under every trial, constituted a precious bequest to the crown and to the nation. The energy of the warrior king was emulated by his immediate descendants, if they could not attempt to combine in so eminent a degree the contemplative with the active principle, as he had combined them. But he presented to his own time, and to all coming time, a model which, to a certain extent, represents our national character, in its union of reflection with action. The world of thought and the world of deed are not with us separated, as with some nations. This notion of the impress of Alfred's character upon the Anglo-Saxon race, or of Alfred presenting a type of that race may be fanciful ; but, at any rate, the leading principle of duty, as the end of life, still survives amongst us. It is our battle cry, and our household precept. In many respects we live in a selfish age, in which duty and interest are confounded ; with most of us pretentious, and with too many unscrupulous. We may be better by being tried by adversity, as this Alfred was tried. But, whatever may be our vices and shortcomings, we are yet able to do honour to the great Saxon who, in no boastful spirit, wrote of himself :—' This I can now truly say, that so long as I lived I have striven to live worthily, and after my death to leave my memory to my descendants, in good works.' "

